The god who dances

करपूर गौरम करूणावतारम संसार सारम भुजगेन्द्र हारम।
सदा वसंतम हृदयारविंदे भवम भवानी सहितं नमामि।

–Adarsh Sharma

Introduction: The Power of Words

Words carry immense power, especially when they are believed to be divinely inspired. Religious texts like the Bible have shaped civilizations, influenced history, and provided comfort in times of despair. But what happens when these sacred words are manipulated, mistranslated, or twisted to serve the interests of a few?

For example in Genesis 1:1 the very first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” this verse has ten words:

1. In
2. the
3. beginning
4. God
5. created
6. the
7. heavens
8. and
9. the
10. earth.

With a full stop in the end,

However, this verse is very different from the original Hebrew text. Scholars generally agree that the verb "created" shouldn't be translated in the past tense. A more accurate version would be "When God began to create." You'll notice that the phrase "in the beginning" wasn't supposed to refer to the beginning of the universe but rather to the beginning of the act of creation.

One could argue to what degree all these features are important, but it's interesting to note that if this text is claimed to be of divine origin, read & practised by billions daily, and had such a significant impact on history, hundreds if not thousands of wars were fought keeping its basis, then it's curious that in the very first sentence, these literary attributes are often deemed irrelevant to the message & the message needs to be communicated irrespective if the original text the literal words of god needs to be twisted & manipulated.

Chapter 1: The First Twist

The first verse of the Bible isn't the only example of such manipulation. Consider Luke 21:4, where Jesus praises a poor widow for giving all she had,"...*but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* Over the centuries, this verse has been exploited by religious institutions to squeeze wealth from the poor, promising salvation in return for their last pennies.

Another example lies in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:20-22; *20 Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his* ***ribs****, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.*

The English translation claims Eve was created from Adam's rib, but the original Hebrew word "tsela" actually means "side" or "half." This mistranslation has reinforced a worldview where women are seen as inferior, contributing to centuries of gender inequality.

Chapter 2: Philosophical Insights and Manipulation

Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Übermensch (superhuman) encourages individuals to strive for greatness. However, godmen often pervert this idea, positioning themselves as Übermensch figures who have transcended ordinary concerns, justifying their manipulation of followers. Schopenhauer's philosophy that life is suffering is similarly exploited, as religious leaders promise false hope and salvation in exchange for wealth and power.

Robert Greene emphasizes the importance of listening to one's inner voice, yet manipulative leaders suppress this voice, creating dependency among followers. Art, music, and personal creativity are vital for nurturing the inner voice, but these expressions are often stifled by those who fear questioning and rebellion.

Chapter 3: The Power of Propaganda and Nationalism

The manipulation of religious texts mirrors the propaganda used by Nazi Germany to control an entire nation. Just as religious leaders twist scripture to serve their interests, political leaders use propaganda to shape public perception and maintain power. Nationalism, like religion, can be a force for unity or division depending on how it's wielded.

In the movie *Taxi Driver* and *Fight Club*, the protagonists represent individuals who, having been manipulated and oppressed by societal norms, turn to violence and destruction as a means of reclaiming their identity. These stories illustrate the dangers of losing touch with one's inner voice and the destructive consequences of manipulation.

Chapter 4: Biological and Social Mechanisms

Human behaviour is influenced by mechanisms like costly signalling (displaying wealth or virtue to gain status), virtue signalling (expressing moral values to appear good), sexual selection (choosing mates based on certain traits), kin selection (helping relatives survive), and group selection (behaviours that benefit the group). Religious institutions have long understood these dynamics and used them to maintain control over their followers.

In the context of costly signalling, consider the grand cathedrals, paintings, and sculptures commissioned by the Church throughout history. These massive displays of wealth were not just acts of faith; they were powerful tools of propaganda, designed to demonstrate the Church's power and divine favour. Nietzsche's insights into the will to power are reflected in these actions, as the Church used these symbols to solidify its authority and influence over the masses. These grand structures were messages of dominance, reinforcing the Church's societal position.

Virtue signalling within religious institutions often involves public displays of piety, where leaders present themselves as paragons of virtue. However, this signalling can be deeply hypocritical, as seen in numerous historical examples where those who appeared most pious were often involved in corruption behind closed doors. Dostoevsky captures this duality in his works, warning of the dangers of false virtue and the moral decay it can bring.

Sexual selection within religious contexts often dictates the norms around marriage and sexuality. These norms are used to control the behaviour of individuals, with religious leaders promoting certain traits as more 'holy' or desirable. This control extends to the fear of being outcast from one's community—kin selection at work—where the pressure to conform to religious standards is heightened by the threat of social exclusion. Carl Jung's exploration of the collective unconscious reveals how deeply ingrained these fears are, making them potent tools for manipulation.

Conclusion: The Journey Towards Fulfillment

As Nietzsche said, "I know of no better life purpose than to perish in attempting the great and impossible." The journey to greatness is filled with struggles, but it is through these struggles that

we find meaning. Religion, when approached with critical thinking, can guide us on this journey, but we must remain wary of those who seek to manipulate us for their gain.

In a world filled with both beauty and suffering, it's essential to recognise the power of love, the importance of struggle, and the need for a disciplined, thoughtful approach to life. Only then can we rise above the manipulations of others and find true fulfilment in our journey.